DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 248 427 CG 017 701

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TITLE A Model for School/Community Interventions with High School Student Paraprofessionals.
PUB DATE 4 May 84
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (56th, Chicago, IL, May 3-5, 1984).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Counselor Role; Delivery Systems; High Schools; *High School Students; Intervention; *Paraprofessional School Personnel; *Peer Counseling; School Community Relationship; *School Psychologists

ABSTRACT

In reviewing the role of the school psychologist, this paper points out the disparity between actual and proposed roles, and suggests that student paraprofessionals could be trained to narrow the gap. Several examples of the student as helper concept are reviewed, and advantages are discussed. A rationale for incorporating the student paraprofessional into the school psychology role and function is presented. Steps in the successful preliminary planning and implementation of such a program are outlined, based on collaboration with other school personnel. Recruitment of student candidates, training, group dynamics, and evaluation and accountability are discussed, and specific intervention strategies that students can implement are described. The increased effectiveness for a school psychological services delivery system using student paraprofessionals is summarized in seven areas, and the value of extending the program into the community is emphasized. The paper concludes with an outline of the proposed model accompanied by selected references for each section. (JAC)

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A MODEL FOR SCHOOL/COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS WITH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT PARAPROFESSIONALS[1]

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While I'm talking, you may refer to the handout for specific references concerning the various points I discuss.

In viewing the role of the school psychologist, particularly in regard to intervention, it is quite obvious that a significant disparity exists between "actual" and "proposed" roles. For example, every major school psychology conference has reiterated a need for the development of broad, proactive service delivery systems in attending to learning and mental health needs of all children. Numerous individual authors have likewise stressed this same theme regarding comprehensiveness of psychological services from diagnostic through intervention and follow-up practices. Official policy statements of the National Association of School Psychologists have further reinforced this viewpoint.

Several recent national surveys suggest that the actual practices of school psychologists fall far short of the proposed ideal. Both the Ramage (1979) and Lacayo, Sherwood and Morris (1981) surveys indicate that narrow,

1. Presentation at Midwestern Psychological Association Convention, Chicago, May 4, 1984.

low visibility diagnostic models continue to predominate the field and, rather than getting any better, this situation is likely to worsen. Results of recent legislation, for example P.L. 94-142, increasing school psychology's focus on the handicapped, have further increased the disparity between proposed and actual role. Also, budgetary constraints within education are likely to continue further restricting school psychology's role to a small number of handicapped students.

One viable solution to lessening the gap between actual and proposed role is the training of paraprofessionals to carry out a significant proportion of school psychology's tasks in serving larger numbers of both handicapped and non-handicapped students having problems. Paraprofessional programs have already been successfully employed within other areas of psychology, particularly clinical and community, since the 1950's. It is my contention that large-scale paraprofessionalism within school psychology would promote broader service delivery models addressing the needs of all school children and also facilitate a much more productive relationship between school and community psychology.

From a practical perspective, it appears that one of the best paraprofessional groups for developing such broader role models in educational settings is students themselves.

The concept "student as helper" has a long history. Written records of the practice date from the first century, A.D. and there are extensive reports of successful student helper programs throughout history. More modern examples of the concept are Joseph Lancaster's monitorial system, developed during the 1800's in England, in which he asserted that one

teacher could handle 1000 students effectively through peer teaching, early American education, in which older pupils in one-room schoolhouses assisted younger pupils with their lessons and many large-scale peer tutoring programs initiated during the 1960's.

A more recent development of the student helper concept has been peer counseling, which refers to peers providing assistance in tutorial as well as other areas, such as social-emotional development. A growing literature has also denoted successful applications across the grade levels for students in this broader paraprofessional role.

Specifically concerning the use of paraprofessionals within school psychology, it is well known that paraprofessional utilization has significantly narrowed the gap between ideal and actual service delivery in many fields, clinical and community psychology among them. School psychology has, during the past decade, been recommending a similar approach. For example, in 1973, the Training and Acreditation Committee of the National Association of School Psychologists included a school psychological aide category in their recommended continuum of services, suggesting that a viable way to perform all recommended school psychology services was to make use of paraprofessionals. However, to date, there are surprisingly few references in the professional literature concerning paraprofessional utilization within school psychology. It is my contention that school psychology should now join the current paraprofessional revolution taking place in many other areas. Also, as I previously mentioned, I feel that the focus should be placed on the child as paraprofessional school psychologist.

There are certain inherent advantages for developing paraprofessional school psychology programs with student recruits. As the primary client of the school psychologist, students are already readily available in large numbers and being free and able to receive academic credit for participating, they are extremely cost effective. Also, students comprise the largest potential group for educating both school system members and society in general regarding the value of psychology in the schools. With that in mind, a rationale for student paraprofessional incorporation into school psychology role and function may be stated as follows:

1.) an extensive historical literature portrays successful interventional roles in tutorial and counseling situations

2.) a beginning literature portrays success in other psychological assistance roles

3.) traditionally, indirect services have predominated school psychology role, with direct services to children comprising very low frequency activities

4.) there has been and most likely always will be too few professionals to meet service demands for all children and others, such as teachers, parents, administrators, in the system

5.) there is much professional agreement that peers already in the natural environment are in an optimal position for providing help to others

6.) as children are the primary client of the school psychologist, there already exists an inherent potential for close professional/paraprofessional relationships to develop and,

7.) research suggests the presence of large informal helping networks in all social groupings, the school being no exception; a school psychologist/student paraprofessional connection only improves upon a natural helping network already in operation

For an example of a large-scale student paraprofessional school psychology program developed at the secondary level, you may refer to my two references in the handout. Also in the handout, I have noted what I consider to be eight essential steps for the development and implementation of student paraprofessional programs and I'll comment briefly on those now.

A first consideration for the school psychologist is to decide on what level of student paraprofessional program involvement is both desired and feasible. In that regard, the psychologist needs to develop a clear statement of professional and paraprofessional roles and expectations which would include the number of students required to carry out prescribed tasks. For example, considering both time factors and the political constraints of the district, the psychologist may decide to begin with just one paraprofessional student trained in a very limited role fashion. Later, the program could be expanded to include dozens of broadly trained students to carry out significant proportions of diagnostic and interventional tasks, under supervision of the school psychologist. Then the school psychologist may decide to further expand the program throughout the district, across districts and eventually, throughout the community.

To facilitate successful implementation of such a program, the local school administration, ideally the building principal, should be worked with in a collaborative fashion from the program's very inception throughout

its operation. Also, district level administration, including the board of education, should be informed that an innovative approach to the delivery of school psychological services is being undertaken with administrative permission.

A next step is to assess the particular needs at the local school in determining what specific tasks the paraprofessional students can undertake. It's advantageous to solicit ideas from school staff regarding how needs in the various areas can best be met.

Next, develop a comprehensive written role definition in clear behavioral terminology describing all the services which could ideally be performed; here demonstrate how the proposed student paraprofessional services will facilitate a more comprehensive meeting of student and system level needs. This written statement should include the capabilities and anticipated effects of the student program, denoting paraprofessional job descriptions, requisite skills needed to perform tasks, what will be involved in recruitment, training, supervision, on-going maintenance of the program and how it will be evaluated.

Then the school psychologist would enter into public relations and educational roles in order to decrease any potential resistances at the outset. There are a number of things the school psychologist can do to accomplish this step. Disseminate the psychologist's role definition, including the proposed student paraprofessional component description, both verbally and in writing, to all school staff through such activities as workshop presentations, individual and small group discussions and use of the media via descriptive letters, school newspaper articles, video tapings,

etc. To reduce initial potential staff resistance, emphasize both the cost effective aspects of the program and give specific concrete examples how it will be of assistance to teachers in classroom situations. Also, for additional public relations, offer school staff participative roles in the program to help establish a firm base of support.

Once these five preliminary steps have been accomplished, actual program implementation can begin.

For recruiting and selecting student paraprofessional candidates, I've included a number of methods and instruments in your handout references. For the psychologist working in the school situation, I would stress the value of school staff, particularly classroom teachers, and peer recommendations. Also, I have found informal advertising techniques, such as brief talks to small groups of students and school newspaper articles, to facilitate the whole recruitment/selection process.

A majority of authors in the paraprofessional area regard training as the most important component of a program. Training is intimately tied to the defined services to be provided and the necessary requisite skills. Obviously, the age and developmental functioning levels of the student paraprofessionals will determine the specific types and manner of presentation for training materials but, in general, step-by-step, didactic-experiential approaches that involve continuous systematic evaluation of trainee's progress toward operationalized goals using instructions, modeling, behavioral rehearsal and immediate performance feedback have proven effective. Also, it is important to provide systematic posttraining evaluation of trainee's skill levels on an on-going basis.

Regarding specific training orientations, the paraprofessional literature favors two major approaches: social learning/behavioral application and communication skills. The handout references are divided into five areas of resource materials in those two contexts. One or a few sources from each area would serve as an adequate resource in developing training exercises for students.

A few other important areas that should be addressed during the early training phases are group dynamics, interviewing skills, common problem areas for the age groups to be served, ethical standards and legal issues concerning paraprofessional functioning with particular regard to working with minors.

The last step for successful program development is evaluation and accountability. Effectiveness of the program needs to be demonstrated on an on-going basis and as such, evaluation should be a thorough and continuous process. Behavioral records of all paraprofessional tasks need to be maintained, along with periodic summary reports of collected data. It's good to keep in mind that informal, qualitative data, such as notes and letters from teachers, parents and others, favorable to the program, are as equally important as hard data.

Regarding specific tasks for the student paraprofessionals to become involved in, allowing for some exceptions in using formal diagnostic devices and of course, allowing for age differences, student paraprofessionals may be trained to function within all proposed areas of school psychology. In your handout, I've noted twelve involvement areas that secondary level students were trained to perform in within a high school paraprofessional

psychology program I developed; you may read more about that model in my reference on comprehensive psychological services. For a few overview comments now- concerning assessment, trained students can significantly broaden assessment practices through such techniques as systematic behavioral observation and data collection, interview procedures and limited diagnostic testing, for example, in the academic achievement area. These broadened assessment practices tend to reduce placement in special education as a major first option and consequently promote a much wider intervention potential. Using student paraprofessionals as school psychological assistants facilitates assessment becoming more of a process rather than a dead-end diagnostic procedure. That is, the student paraprofessional, once assigned to a client needing help, may carry through from initial assessment procedures to intervention implementations to re-assessment, follow-up and evaluation.

Regarding specific intervention strategies, student paraprofessionals can be instrumental in facilitating IEP recommendations for special education students, in carrying out prescriptions to maintain handicapped students in the mainstream and in serving the educational and mental health needs of vast numbers of students who do not fit into special educational categories. Also, in addition to peer tutoring and peer counseling assignments, peer helpers may act as co-leaders with the professional in various types of group work, manage a counseling drop-in center and, be active in a number of preventive intervention efforts, such as working with specially targeted at-risk students like potential drop-outs, frequent truants or disciplinary referrals. Student paraprofessionals are invaluable as liaison agents. School psychologists are often overwhelmed at the prospect of

maintaining high frequency contact with individuals both inside and outside the school system, as well as a multitude of community agencies, so that having a number of available student helpers makes this role very feasible. Another intervention area for student helpers is serving in various support roles, such as in assisting new students to the school and providing friendship associations to students undergoing situational crises, such as loss of a parent.

Student paraprofessionals can greatly facilitate the educational role of the school psychologist. They can help in the collaboration with teachers of on-going psychology and related courses, serving as an educational resource to such classes. They can also educate school personnel, students and parents regarding the many benefits of school psychological practice through such activities as writing articles for school publications, being interviewed by community newspapers or other media, etc.

As a last student involvement area to comment on- having a number of trained student helpers available can greatly enhance evaluation and accountability for the psychological services program. The students can facilitate data collection and maintenance of records, as well as carry out scholarly projects as part of their overall functioning.

The increased effectiveness for a school psychological services delivery system using student paraprofessionals can be summed in the seven areas I have noted in your handout:

1.) broader roles are made possible in all school psychology functioning areas,

2.) as noted before, diagnosis and intervention become an on-going

process,

3.) in addition to serving only small numbers of special education students, large numbers of students and others in the system receive necessary services, making psychology proactive rather than merely reactive,

4.) as noted before, an education role becomes possible,

5.) with increased visibility in a positive light, psychological services in the schools become more accepted by everyone,

6.) increased acceptance of services encourages more lay support for mental health practices in schools particularly and society in general and,

7.) reduction of the potential for psychologist burnout is facilitated through association with other than just "troubled" students.

For a final note regarding a student paraprofessional program beyond the immediate school, I would like to point out that both the goals and clientele of school and community psychology extensively overlap. It only makes sense then that closer working relationships between the two subspecialties would significantly increase productivity and accountability for both. Traditionally, while there has been liaison between the two areas regarding sharing of diagnostic information about mutual clients, there has been very little joint effort in interventional roles. Paraprofessional programs based within educational settings and expanded into community areas could do much to bring school and community psychology together. Ideally, the school is considered a focal point within a community. It is my contention that student paraprofessional school psychology programs could be

developed within all schools in an interactive fashion with both school and community resources. Such programs could be initially developed at secondary levels and extended downward, with high school students actively involved with the younger age levels in practice and training activities. Other paraprofessional groups, such as parent volunteers, elderly persons, college students, etc., could then be attached to these core programs in both schools and community settings. Such interactive models would revolutionize the practice of psychology in both school and community areas by creating a comprehensive helping network throughout entire communities.

In summary, historically there has been a significant disparity between the actual and the proposed roles for psychologists practicing in schools, with proposed models calling for services to all school children and the system at large while actual models have attended to small numbers of handicapped pupils. Paraprofessional models have been demonstrated to be one successful method for productive role expansion in both clinical and community psychology and the same could occur in school psychology. Children would be ideal paraprofessional school psychology candidates to train. Certain steps and guidelines need to be followed for the successful development and implementation of such programs. Students trained for paraprofessional roles can cover the full range of school psychologist activities. Such programs should not be limited to school settings but expanded into community areas, allowing school and community psychology to function in a more integrated, holistic fashion.

MIDWESTERN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Chicago, Illinois

May 3-5, 1984

A MODEL FOR SCHOOL/COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS WITH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT PARAPROFESSIONALS

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G. A Rationale for Student Paraprofessionalism Within School Psychology

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2. a beginning literature portrays success in other psychological assistance roles
3. traditionally, indirect services have predominated school psychology role, with direct services to children comprising very low frequency activities
4. there has been and most likely always will be too few professionals to meet service demands for all children and others, such as teachers, parents, administrators, in the system
5. there is much professional agreement that peers already in the natural environment are in an optimal position for providing help to others
6. as children are the primary client of the school psychologist, there already exists an inherent potential for close professional/paraprofessional relationships to develop, and
7. research suggests the presence of large informal helping networks in all social groupings, the school being no exception; a school psychologist/student paraprofessional connection only improves upon a natural helping network already in operation

III. Example of Student Paraprofessional Program at Secondary Level

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1. determination of student participation level
2. collaboration between psychologist and school administration at all levels
3. needs assessment
4. development of written role definition, delineating student paraprofessional involvement areas
5. engagement in public relations/educational roles- overcoming resistances
6. student recruitment/selection

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8. program evaluation/accountability

IV. Student Paraprofessional Involvement Areas

1. recruitment/training
2. individual direct student assistance
3. group direct student assistance
4. indirect student assistance
5. assessment/evaluation
6. environmental/system impact
7. education
8. liaison
9. program organization
10. drop-in center management
11. fund raising
12. personal growth

V. Program Effectiveness/Results

1. broader roles- comprehensive psychological services (additional diagnosis/intervention, consultation, evaluation, research, training and supervision)

2. facilitation of diagnostic-intervention "process"
3. broad, proactive services to regular students and others (parents, teachers, counselors, administrators, custodians, etc.)
4. expanded psychological education role
5. increased visibility and acceptance of psychological services
6. encouragement of lay support for mental health/psychological services in schools and society in general
7. prolongation of psychologist's sanity by associating with other than "troubled" clients

VI. Still Broader Models- Beyond School-Wide

A. Liaison/Visibility Roles

B. Generative School/Community Psychology Interactive Models